



Natural Heritage &
Endangered Species
Program

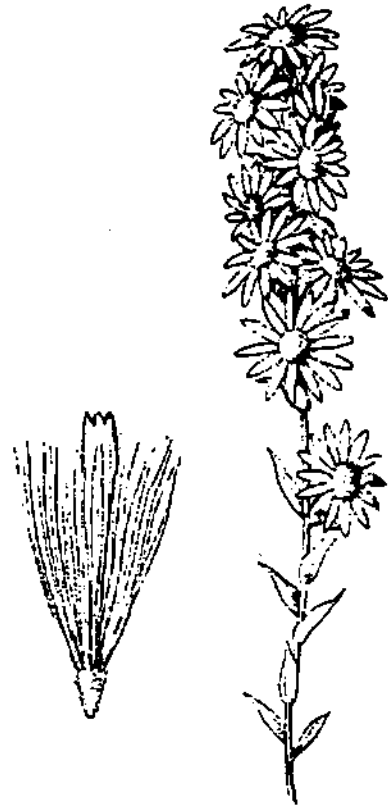
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MASSACHUSETTS RARE AND ENDANGERED PLANTS

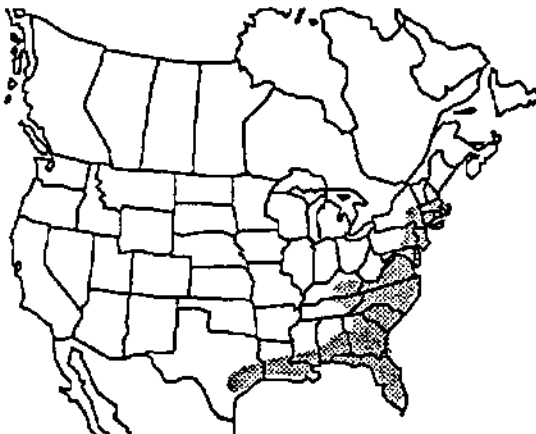
EASTERN SILVERY ASTER
(*Aster concolor* L.)

Description

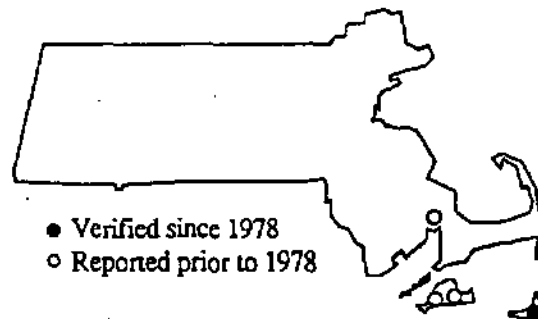
Eastern silvery aster is a slender, lilac-flowered perennial in the Aster family (Compositae or Asteraceae). It grows from about 3 to 10 dm (0.75 to 3.5 ft.) in height. Its stems are simple or sparingly branched and rise either singly or in small groups from a frequently thickened root crown. The rather densely arranged leaves are stalkless, smooth-margined, oblong or lanceolate, and slightly clasping at the base. They measure up to 1.5 cm (0.6 in.) wide by 5 cm (2 in.) long; however, toward the top of the stem, they become gradually smaller. Eastern silvery aster's common name comes from the pale coating of silky hairs on both sides of the leaves. The achenes (dry, one-seeded fruits) are silky, as well. The flower heads occur in narrow racemes (elongate, unbranched inflorescences of stalked flowers) and, occasionally, in panicles (branched racemes). Each head has 8-16 showy lilac rays. Eastern silvery aster blooms from September to early October.



Newcomb, Lawrence. Newcomb's Wildflower Guide. Little, Brown and Company, Boston. 1977.



Documented Range of Eastern
Silvery Aster



Massachusetts Distribution by Town

Range

The documented range of eastern silvery aster encompasses the coastal states, from Massachusetts south to Florida and Louisiana and west to southwestern Texas. Eastern silvery aster may also grow in the mountains of Kentucky and Tennessee.

Similar Species

The showy aster (*A. spectabilis*) occupies similar habitats (e.g. sites on dry, sandy soil in open woodlands) and is somewhat similar in appearance to the eastern silvery aster. Nevertheless, its basal leaves have long stalks, while the leaves of eastern silvery aster are stalkless. Furthermore, showy aster's flowers are bright violet-purple. Eastern silvery aster's lilac-colored flowers make it unique among the asters in our area.

Habitat in Massachusetts

In general, eastern silvery aster occurs on dry, sandy soil in open woods and barrens. In Massachusetts, it is usually found on dry open sandplains or "moors," occasionally among pine trees. (The plant was once common on the moors of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard.) Associated species include bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), New England blazing star (*Liatris borealis*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), Pennsylvania sedge (*Carex pensylvanica*), bushy aster (*Aster dumosum*), bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*), black huckleberry (*Gaylussacia baccata*) and late lowbush blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*). Rare Massachusetts plants that have been found with silvery eastern aster include sandplain flax (*Linum intercursum*), bushy rockrose (*Helianthemum dumosum*), sandplain blue-eyed Grass (*Sisyrinchium arenicola*), purple cudweed (*Gnaphalium purpureum*) and Nantucket shadbush (*Amelanchier nantucketensis*).

Population Status

Eastern silvery aster is presently listed as "Endangered" in Massachusetts. There are ten current stations (verified or relocated since 1978) in one town and seven historical stations (unverified since 1978) in four towns in the Commonwealth. (One town contains both current and historical stations and is represented by a single, solid dot on the town distribution map.) Reasons for the plant's rarity in the state include loss of habitat due to encroachment by scrub oak (*Quercus ilicifolia*) and by pine-oak forest; in part, this loss is due to excessive fire suppression and lack of disturbance. In addition, Massachusetts is at the northern edge of the plant's range. Eastern silvery aster is also considered rare in New York, New Jersey and Kentucky. It was present historically in Rhode Island, Delaware and Maryland.